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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

11 May 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: France and the Algerian Problem

1. The collapse of the generals' mutiny in Algeria has apparently cleared the way for de Gaulle to begin negotiations with the Moslem rebels, but the serious weaknesses in his regime laid bare by the revolt still remain. Although the conspiracy was primarily confined to a few activists in the army, the belief that the objectives of the activists enjoyed broad passive support within the military, and the fear that many public officials would not act against the insurgents in a showdown, caused near panic in some government circles during the crisis. Moreover, it appears that the public which respects de Gaulle's determination to pursue negotiations and most of the military and police units that rallied to resist the coup did so more in response to de Gaulle's personal force than out of respect for the legitimate authority of his government. Since the revolt the

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repressive and authoritarian measures undertaken by the President have caused serious misgivings even among those who supported him during the crisis. Thus, France approaches the delicate business of negotiating a peace settlement shaken and sorely divided.

2. Although the failure of the mutiny revealed the futility of organized opposition to de Gaulle, there is still some immediate danger that individual army extremists, European colons, or right-wing terrorists will relieve their frustrations over the recent debacle by acts of violence that will either delay the opening of negotiations, now scheduled for 20 May, or touch off a blood bath between Moslems and whites. We cannot rule out the possibility that attempts will be made on the life of de Gaulle or of his prominent associates. Passions are running high on all sides: the army, pained by the spectacle of a few officers being punished for views shared by many, is apprehensive lest de Gaulle's threatened purge destroy what remains of esprit de corps. The European settlers feel themselves completely isolated by the puncture of the army revolt. Most are resigning themselves to a bleak future in a Moslem-dominated Algeria, but a few, at least, are certainly at least tempted to take their vengeance on the government first.

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3. The enthusiasm of the Moslem population of Algeria for de Gaulle is high once again and should strengthen the President's position both in the negotiations and in dealing with his own military establishment. However, it is unlikely to remain so unless he gives continuing evidence of his determination to control terrorism by the colons and to eliminate Algérie Française elements in the army. Indeed, the Moslems of the cities, although generally disposed to lie low while things are going their way, would probably respond violently to provocation by colon troublemakers. In these circumstances they would view French military or police action in defense of the colons as indicating that de Gaulle was still a captive of his own extremists.

Negotiations

4. The chances of negotiations between the PGAR and the French being initiated and successfully carried out depend as much on the attitudes of the PGAR leaders as on de Gaulle's capacity to curb French extremists who would sabotage the talks. Some reports have depicted the rebel leaders as alarmed during the mutiny that their last opportunity to negotiate a settlement with France would evaporate if the army putsch succeeded.

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Nevertheless, the PGAR remains divided and vacillating over the preconditions of negotiations and the strategies to be employed if they are begun. Its moderate wing is uncertain whether rebel field commanders, some of whom are convinced that the French will ultimately tire of the struggle, can be counted on to observe a truce arrangement. In addition the moderates are somewhat hesitant about opening discussions for fear that if there is another breakdown as at Melun last June, they will be stigmatized as dupes of the French.

5. The more militant wing of the rebel movement apparently has been under heavy pressure from Cairo to resist any French offer to negotiate that was not accompanied by an implicit French undertaking to recognize the PGAR as the legitimate government of an independent Algeria. While the militants are aware that de Gaulle will not negotiate on this condition, and while they probably would not hold out for it, they have been made fearful that unless the dominant position of the PGAR in Algeria is secured in advance it might be jeopardized after negotiations. Accordingly, this wing is wary of any negotiations and tends to take comfort in the thought that if negotiations in fact do not take place the FLN will ultimately achieve a military triumph

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with the military aid promised by the Bloc. It has recently been reported that large new stocks of small and light arms are stored in Egypt awaiting transshipment to Algeria should planned negotiations break down.

De Gaulle's Negotiating Position

6. After months of painstaking political effort and pressure, de Gaulle, had, even before the Generals' revolt, developed a negotiating position that was not only stripped of any mention of a "French Algeria" solution, but was specifically designed to meet most of the principal Moslem demands. Apparently he does not feel that his bargaining strength has been reduced in any significant degree because he has since the mutiny reiterated the basic outlines of his position. France will offer the Moslems a choice between "association" and complete independence. The "association" concept now appears to amount to virtually complete national sovereignty with provisions for the maintenance of limited base rights. To the independence option the President has attached the somewhat ambiguous threat that in a fully independent Algeria, Europeans and pro-French Moslems will be withdrawn to urban centers where their personal interests may be defended.

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7. This position probably contains a sufficient mixture of enticement and threat to lure the reluctant PGAR into fruitful discussions. However, substantial areas of ambiguity still exist on such questions as the disposition of the Saharan regions (which the rebels claim as part of Algeria and which de Gaulle has suggested might be administered by mixed commissions), the manner and pace of French troop withdrawals, and the role of the PGAR during the interim period between a truce and a referendum. Given de Gaulle's determination to liquidate the war, there is a fair possibility that even these difficult points can be settled by compromise. On the other hand, the PGAR extremists, who may feel that rifts exposed in the French Army insure their ultimate victory with or without negotiations, will almost certainly keep pressure on the moderates to insist on exacting stiff concessions on these issues from the French. Moreover, if these issues can easily rouse Moslem suspicions of French good faith; the talks could break down on differences over one or all of them at any time.

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Prospects

8. Over the short run it is likely that de Gaulle will act vigorously to eliminate all obstacles to successful initiation of negotiations with the PGAR. He will not hesitate to make full use of his emergency powers to root out potential saboteurs of his policy and to stifle any French criticism of his moves. While he may win the confidence of the PGAR negotiators by such tactics, it is probable that he will repel some of his current supporters in France and he might drive his enemies to acts of desperation. Even under the best of circumstances we believe that the negotiations, if they are to succeed at all, will take many months. Frequent breakdowns and postponements are likely and on each such occasion opponents of an independent Algeria will take new hope and seek new means to assure that the talks are not resumed. On balance, we do not rate the chances of a negotiated settlement being worked out during this round at any more than even.

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9. Over the longer run it seems clear that recent events in Algeria and France have made the situation in both countries dangerously fragile. The PGAR probably regards the forthcoming peace talks as the last effort it will make to end its rebellion by peaceful means. If the effort fails, the PGAR will almost certainly rapidly come under the domination of its extremist wing, which then probably will not hesitate to solicit heavy Bloc aid. In France de Gaulle may find himself sorely taxed by the necessity to preoccupy himself with the Algerian problem at a time when he is anxious to take vigorous steps to assert French leadership over the continent. His frustrations will almost certainly be reflected in the French public -- many elements of which are already deeply troubled by the authoritarian cast of his leadership, and the tendency of his government to monopolize credit for breaking the generals' mutiny. We believe that although de Gaulle's government may no longer be susceptible to a rightist overthrow, his political future and that of France will almost certainly be difficult and possibly hazardous, whether he obtains a settlement in Algeria or not.

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